

What are Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome?

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Those that suffer with FM/CFS are frequently shunned by friends, misunderstood by family, maligned by doctors and denied by insurers. Most suffer in silence, trying to make the best out of every day. But let's see if we can understand what this is all about. First FM/CFS or CFIDS (chronic fatigue, immune deficiency syndrome) is not a disease. By that I mean it is not a single entity caused by a single agent. We are talking about a syndrome, which means a collection of symptoms that are seen together frequently enough that physicians create a short hand name as an easy way of discussing them. The symptoms include fatigue that is inadequately relieved by rest and that often gets worse for hours or days after attempted exercise. The Fibromyalgia refers to an achiness that may be generalized or more localized, usually to head, neck and upper back areas. Many sufferers also have impaired concentration and memory described as "brain fog". Usually the immune system is imbalanced as well.

While there may be many other symptoms these are the most common. If you do not have FM/CFS, to best understand how it feels, think back to a time when you had the flu. You were tired, achy and could barely get out bed let alone get anything done. Maybe you could barely read or focus on anything more demanding than TV. Now imagine that you wake up every day and still feel that way, week after week, year after year. When you think of living "with the flu" for months or years it then becomes understandable why depression is so commonly observed in sufferers. The frequency of depression, unfortunately, led many doctors to incorrectly conclude that it was the depression itself that was causing the sufferers to imagine symptoms of what was once disparagingly called the "Yuppie flu".

Today many open minded health care professionals are aware of this syndrome and are finding ways to help those who suffer with this complex condition. We now realize that before we can relieve the symptoms of this growing menace we need to understand the causes and be able to identify them. This is not always easy but is only achievable with a good listener searching for the clues as to the origins in each individual. It requires tracking the history back to the last time you felt well and working forward from that time. Often, seemingly unrelated symptoms during childhood can give us clues to the causes of current problems. And note that I did say causes because there is often more than one cause of complex syndromes such as these. Ultimately all causes impair the function of our cells energy production centers called mitochondria. When their ability to produce energy is impaired our muscles and brains are weak. In the absence of adequate energy, inflammatory mediators and acid byproducts accumulate in our tissues and cause pain. So treatment must include addressing the body's energy needs, but unless we uncover and remedy the cause or causes then we are doomed to a chronic uphill struggle and repeated recurrences over the years.

The causes are as diverse as the symptoms and the people who suffer from them. Some of the more common aggravating problems are intestinal imbalances especially an overgrowth of a fungus called *Candida albicans*. This may result from use of antibiotics,

steroids, birth control pills, or inadequate stomach acid (worsened by use of acid blocking medications). A "leaky gut" occurs when the cement (called desmosome bonds) that binds intestinal cells together begins to loosen so that incompletely digested food particles and undesired bacterial/fungal byproducts are able to gain access to our body where they overwhelm the immune system and cause toxic symptoms. Anti-inflammatory medications such as aspirin and ibuprofen are among the common causes of leaky gut.

Many people have been found to harbor large amounts of toxic substances including industrial chemicals, pesticides and insecticides in their tissues. Their livers may be unable to detoxify these substances and so they accumulate in the body. Other people have excessive loads of toxic metals such as mercury, lead, cadmium and arsenic. Still others have inadequate functional reserves of certain hormones especially adrenal hormones and others have tissue resistance to "normal blood levels" of thyroid hormone. These are just some of the more common causes that have to be dealt with in the process of healing people who suffer with Chronic Fatigue and Fibromyalgia. Interestingly, all of them have in common an ability to block the production of energy by the mitochondria.

Other sufferers have chronic infections including Lyme and other bacterial infections, or viral infections such as HHV6. Infecting agents may be living inside our cells where the immune system cannot attack them. They may be in areas with poor blood supply such as around root canals. Still others have developed coagulation problems causing tiny fibrin depositions that accumulate and block blood flow depriving the tissues of needed nutrients to produce energy.

As you can imagine with so many possible causative factors, it takes patience and a detailed history to begin to unravel the tangle of diagnostic possibilities. It then takes experience to plan a treatment program. Treatments that we have utilized may vary from simple dietary changes and supplement regimens, to food and environmental allergy identification, to detoxification and intravenous therapies.

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